



UPDATE

Newsletter of the N.Y. African Burial Ground Project

The African Burial Ground Project and the OPEI are fully funded by the U.S. General Services Administration

Fall/Winter 2003

• www.africanburialground.com •

Volume 3, Issue 10

“THE RITES OF ANCESTRAL RETURN”

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

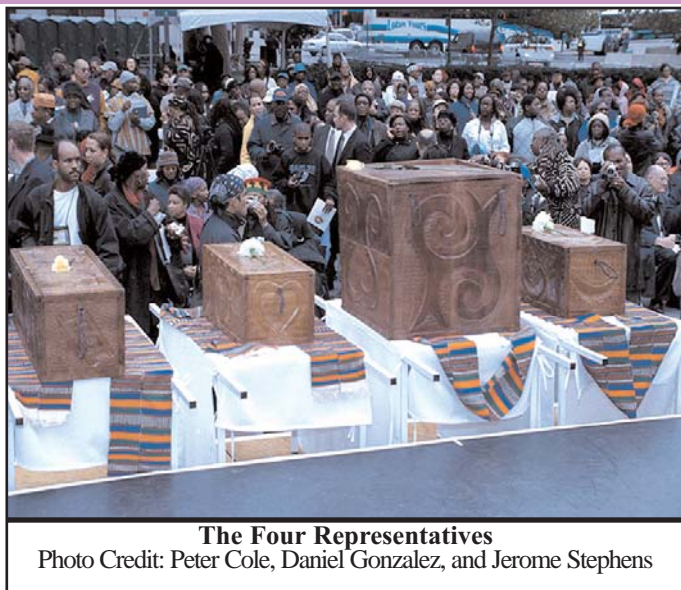
DEAR UPDATE READERS,

More than 10,000 people came together in eight cities over a period of five days to pay final tribute to the ancestral remains of 419 African men, women and children en route to reburial at the landmark 18th-century NY African Burial Ground. The “Rites of Ancestral Return” ceremony began at Howard University’s Rankin Hall at 6:00 pm on September 30, 2003.

The ceremonies were facilitated by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, under the leadership of Dr. Howard Dodson. The ancestral remains of four representatives—a man, woman, girl and boy—traveled from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore, Md., to Wilmington, Del., to Philadelphia, Pa., and to Camden, Newark, and Jersey City, N.J. for a series of commemorative tributes. In Baltimore a noon tribute ceremony was held at Willard A. Allen Masonic Temple on Wednesday, October 1, 2003, followed by a 6:00 pm ceremonial procession. In Wilmington a 7:15 pm tribute ceremony was held at Mother African Union Church. On Thursday, October 2, 2003, an 11:00 am tribute ceremony was held at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia followed by a libation and prayer ceremony in Congo Square. At 6:00 pm, a tribute ceremony began at Bethel Baptist Church in Newark.

On the morning of Friday, October 3, 2003, the flotilla carrying the ancestral remains departed Jersey City after a brief prayer tribute.

The remains arrived in N.Y. on Friday, October 3, at the foot of Wall Street, the former location of the



The Four Representatives

Photo Credit: Peter Cole, Daniel Gonzalez, and Jerome Stephens

18th-century “Slave Market.” The arrival ceremony held at the Wall Street Pier was attended by approximately 400 people along with libation, drumming, song, prayers, and greetings from spiritual, community, and political leaders and celebrities. The program co-hosts for the historic occasion were actors Phylicia Rashad and Delroy Lindo.

Speakers included: Dr. Kofi Asare Opoku, Rev. James Forbes, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, N.J. Secretary of State Regina Thomas, N.Y. Secretary of State Randy Daniels, Hon. David Dinkins, GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry, N.Y.C. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Congressman Charles Rangel, State Senator David Paterson, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Councilman Charles Barron, Council Speaker Gilford Miller, The Descendents of the Afrikan Burial Ground, Drs. Jackson Cole, Michael Blakey, Howard Dodson, Sherrill D. Wilson (OPEI), and others.

(Continued on page 6)

“To honor the love, lives, and labor of our ancestors is the greatest lesson of the African Burial Ground. I look forward to returning to commemorate them with my family every year!”

Christopher Moore
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI). Inquiries about the Project may be sent to: 201 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. Our telephone number is (212) 337-2001.

Faxes may be sent to (212) 337-1447.

Please send e-mail inquiries to
nyabg@att.net.

Update provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

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Letters to the Editor

I wish to congratulate you, as the major phase of the African Burial Ground Project has been completed. That is, Saturday's reinterment of the 419 bones.

As far as I am concerned, the project is still an active endeavor. The history, the youth involvement, the symbolism, etc. must continue. Perhaps now, the stamp request can be revived.

In spite of ... the many struggles along the way, you focused on the goal, and it has been achieved.

Silvera L. Mosley
Brooklyn N.Y.

Congratulations and thank you for all of your efforts on behalf of cultural preservation. In 1980 I worked at 26 Federal Plaza and recall many rumors about the burial ground underneath the restaurant where we ate breakfast and lunch.

The best is yet to come. We must hold on.

Arlene D. Simmons, M.P.A.
New York, N.Y.

I was tremendously moved by the ceremony at the African Burial Ground and thought you'd like to see my article about it, which is appearing in many newspapers. It is also on my website. (www.AliceBernstein.net). I'd welcome your thoughts about it.

Alice Bernstein
New York, N.Y.

At it's regular meeting of October 15, 2003, the Newark, (N.J.) Municipal Council adopted Resolution # 7Rco 101503, "commending the Rites of Ancestral Return Celebration at Bethany Baptist Church," held Thursday, October 2, 2003, commemorating the dignified and proper reinterment of the skeletal remains at the Old African Ground in New York City. Furthermore, the Governing Body greatly appreciates your many, consequential deeds in making this historic, archeological endeavor a tremendous success.

Mr. Robert P. Marasco,
Newark, N.J.

It is my pleasure to address you after such a wonderful experience provided to us in Baltimore on last Wednesday.

I wish you continued success in the excellent results you are achieving through your leadership.

Hilbert D. Stanley
Baltimore, M.D.

**OPEI welcomes letters from its readers but reserves
the right to edit for length and clarity**

U.S. General Services Update

✿ GSA is honored to provide the leadership, manpower resources, and funding for the African Burial Ground Project. We are proud of the extraordinary leadership demonstrated by GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry and the diligence and persistence of the New York-based project team headed by Regional Administrator Karl H. Reichelt.

GSA takes great pride in the widespread acknowledgment that our recent efforts have transformed this project from a source of controversy to an achievement of historic, international proportion. The week long ceremonies commemorating the African Burial Ground reinterment represented an affirmation of GSA's overall progress and commitment toward successfully completing all elements of the African Burial Ground Project.

Since 2001, GSA has taken significant steps to move this project forward on several fronts:

The historic and scientific work funded by GSA and underway at Howard University;

The reinterment following a five-state, eight-city program conceived and managed for GSA by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture;

The development and construction of an on-site memorial and an accompanying educational center by fall 2005.

These are accomplishments long overdue, but when completed will live on in cultural and historic importance for generations.

Finally, GSA's ongoing commitment is successfully reflected through its newly formed partnership with the National Park Service (NPS). The NPS will contribute in the evolution of the memorial, education center and future of the African Burial Ground Memorial Site.

✿ **The U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS)** has entered into an agreement with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to provide assistance in the development of the Exterior Memorial to honor those interred in New York City's African Burial Ground and an Interpretive Center to tell their story. Most importantly, the NPS will actively engage the public in a shared effort to shape the future of the African Burial Ground.

The African Burial Ground, a national historic landmark, is one of America's most important places. It is the NPS mission to protect and to tell the stories of these places.

The NPS has formed a team of specialists to support the planning and design of facilities and programs. The team will be working closely

with the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI) and IDI Construction Company, Inc. (IDI). IDI was selected by a GSA panel to build the Interpretive Center. The team will rely on the considerable skills and knowledge that OPEI and IDI bring to the African Burial Ground Project.

The team will also assist GSA in reviewing and selecting a suitable design for the Exterior Memorial. It is essential that the nature of the site be taken into account. In addition, it is equally important that the Exterior Memorial be connected thematically to the site's interpretive program.

The NPS will also explore the various options and alternatives for the configuration of the site, composition of the stories and programming of the interpretive opportunities. The NPS team looks forward to developing a network of partners and welcomes participation in this process.

For more information on the National Park Service, please visit www.nps.gov.

African Burial Ground Team Members

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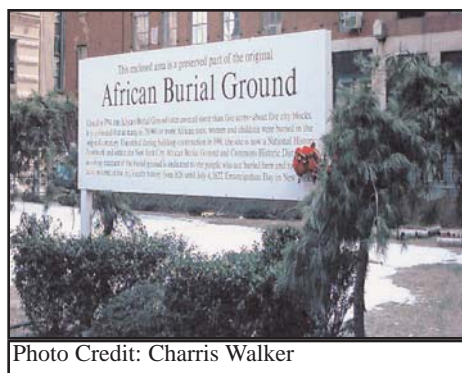


Photo Credit: Charis Walker

“Rites Of Ancestral Return”

September 30- October 4, 2003

The following is a poem written by Ms. Sharon E. Wellons, Poet of Philadelphia P.A., written to alert coworkers at the federal Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration in the Curtis Center that when they looked out the Walnut Street windows on Washington (a.k.a. Congo) Square, they would see four coffins...

“October 2, 2003”

They are here.

The remains of four captive people a man, a woman, 2 children.

En route to the African Burial Ground in New York City,

Encased in coffins carved in Ghana, West Africa.

Their existence was distorted by cruel slavery,

Slavery driven by greed that tainted the world,

Even the founding of a great nation.



Releasing the Doves

Photo Credit: Peter Cole, Daniel Gonzalez, and Jerome Stephens

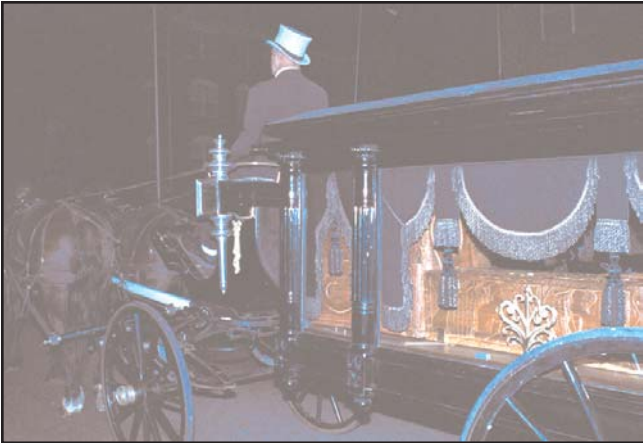


Boys and Girls Choir of Harlem of The Choir Academy of Harlem

Photo Credit: Charris Walker

“Rites Of Ancestral Return”

September 30- October 4, 2003



The Ancestral Return

Photo Credit: Peter Cole, Daniel Gonzalez, and Jerome Stephens

All of us know, whatever color skin we
happened to be born in this lifetime,
Whether our roots are African, Asian,
European, Hispanic,
Islamic, Jewish, or Native American,
That the sweetest taste on the face of this
earth is the taste of freedom, and
The deepest prayer in the heart of
humankind is the prayer of peace.



Medgar Evers College Imani Dancers

Photo Credit: Charris Walker



The Coffins & Crypt

Photo Credit: Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson



“THE RITES OF ANCESTRAL RETURN” (continued)

Musical tributes were offered by the Eli Fountain and International Percussion, The Boys Choir of Harlem, The Girls Choir of Harlem and The Ebony Brass Ensemble.

Following the N.Y. Wall Street Tribute ceremony, the four ancestral remains embarked on an African Burial Ground five-borough tour. At the landmark African Burial Ground site an overnight, commemorative vigil was held featuring the Medgar Evers College Imani Dance and Drum Ensemble, and many others.

On Saturday, October 4, the pre-tribute ceremony for the reburial was held at Foley Square, in lower Manhattan, beginning at 10:00 am. This pre-tribute ceremony began with song and dance. The performing artists included: the Total Praise Ensemble, Emmanuel Baptist Church, the Olive Pointer-Noel Pointer Foundation, violinist Sa-Idah, dancer Derick K. Grant and the Ebony Ecumenical Ensemble. The final tribute ceremony began at 11:00 am and included a host of celebrities and clerical and spiritual leaders. A libation was poured by Dr. Kofi Asare Opoku, followed by a Call to Celebration of Life by Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Sr. of the Riverside Church. Interfaith Prayers were offered by Heru Ankh’Ra Semahj Se Ptah, Iman Bin-Yousef, Dr. Ephraim Isaac and Rev. Wendell Foster. Celebrity participants included Avery Brooks, Maya Angelou, Cicely Tyson, Delroy Lindo, and Phylicia Rashad. Musical tributes were offered by The Girls Choir of Harlem, The Boys Choir of Harlem, and the NY-based Tribute Mass Choir, which included choirs of Bethany Baptist Church, Christ United Church, Concord Baptist Church in Christ, Convent

Avenue Baptist Church, Emanuel Baptist, The Crusaders, Evening Star Baptist Church, The Riverside Church-Inspirational Choir, the Ebony Ecumenical Ensemble, and the Broadway Inspirational Voices. Dance tributes included performances by the Marie Brooks Pan Caribbean Children’s Dance Company, and the Alvin Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance students. Other noted speakers included Dr. Adelaide Sanford, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, Rev. Carolyn Holloway, Marta Vega and Cannon Frederick Williams. A poetic tribute was offered by 5-year-old Autumn. The program concluded with a song from the Tribute Mass Choir and closing prayers.

Shortly after 2:30 pm, the first of seven crypts containing the coffins of 419 ancestral remains was descended into the earth. Chief Alagba Egunfemi Adegbolola, offered final prayers and sacred offerings as the crypts descended, amidst the tears, prayers, song and drumming of the throngs of living descendants who sought to reach out and touch for the last time the coffins of the African men, women and children who lived and died helping to build New York. Between 3:00 and 5:00 pm, the final farewell was made to those African ancestors whose remains were excavated in 1991-92. Their lives and untimely deaths serve as a painful reminder to all of us of the sacrifices and hardships endured by Africans in 18th-century New York.

At last, May our Ancestors Rest in Peace!

As Always May the Ancestors Guide Us...

Sherrill D. Wilson
✿



OUR ANCESTORS

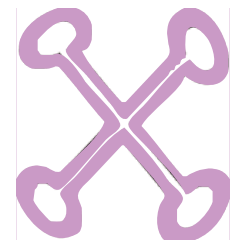
*Their eyes have long been closed
some with coins upon their lids
and yet their voices spring from the
tongues of babes*

*Their pained and tortured bodies
attest to their
strength to endure and to build
“making a way out of no way...”*

*all my life I have heard in the old
South
that this country was built upon the
backs of our fathers, our mothers
sisters and brothers...*

*and yet I never dreamt that the task
was one so painfully shared by
the Africans of old New York.*

Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, 1995



Nyame Mawu
Life After Death



**OPEI Announces
The African Burial Ground
Poetry, Short Story and Essay Competition**



G u i d e l i n e s

- The competition is open to students at elementary, junior high, high school and college levels.
- One winner and a runner-up will be chosen from each educational level.
- Winning entries will be published in *Update*:
The Newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project.
- This competition is for poetry, short stories and essays that focus on the subject of the New York African Burial Ground or the African presence in colonial New York City.
- Short-story and essay entries should be 1200 words or less.
Poetry entries should be 150 words or less.
- The evaluation of submissions will be based on clarity and original themes.
- All entries must be postmarked by March 31, 2004 and sent with an official entry form.

**For an entry form and information package please call
(212) 337-2001**

OPEI Volunteer Profile:



June Terry

Donna Harden-Cole

Born in Courtville VA, Ms. June Terry has been in New York since 1947. She is the mother of six, grandmother of four and has two great-grand children. A graduate of New York's premiere design school, The Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), Ms. Terry majored in pattern making and costume design. She has been fascinated by art since she was a youngster and has honed that interest into a very worthwhile career as a costume designer and expert craft artist. She designs for a variety of shows and plays, especially in the African-American theatre circuit. Her deftness in the costume design field was recently given national attention when she was nominated for the 2002-2003 Annual Vivian Robinson AUDELCO (Audience Development Committee, Inc.) Recognition Award for Excellence in Black Theatre in October 2003.

Ms. Terry now volunteers her artful skills with the African Burial Ground Project. Her interest in becoming a volunteer with the African Burial Ground Project actually dates back to 20 years prior to the finding of the burial remains when in 1971 she traveled to Africa's west coast, where she lived for some five years in Ghana. She recalled the various rituals observed when someone would pass away and the prolific preparation and ceremony undertaken to pay respect to the deceased. It would be more of a celebration of the person's life as opposed to a sad mourning, she reminisced. The coffin designs were of a particular interest to her as she learned that coffins in general were designed to specifically reflect the personality and interests of loved ones in life. For example, she recalls seeing an airplane carved on a coffin once, paying homage to a person whose life was associated with aviation.

The funerals she attended in Ghana would include what she referred to as professional mourners and dancers lasting for days at a time in celebration of the person's life. Food would be put down every evening in front of the coffin and the body

would be treated nightly with camphorated oil to keep it preserved. Observing the detailed and delicate preparation and care of the deceased is an experience that was indelibly etched in her memory.

It was the memory of the intricate steps taken to pay homage and celebrate a person's life during Ghanaian funerals which sparked this now silvered-hair community stalwart to become an advocate for the African Burial Ground Project back in 1991. Ms. Terry cited the various news announcements and articles surrounding the 1991 recovery of the ancestral remains.

Reports of the remains being built upon astonished her and sent her on a crusade to pass the word throughout the community and to the representatives that action needed to be taken to eradicate what she saw as the inappropriate handling of ancestral remains. Attending a lecture by black archaeologist Rita Perkins leveled her understanding of the importance of the recovery of these sacred remains. She knew, based on her experience in Ghana some 20 years prior, that the African Burial Ground remains were not being treated according to cultural practice. Her advocacy would later evolve into joining the Volunteer Program at the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground.

"It was like a huge feeling of relief" she sighed. Ms. Terry expressed a feeling of joy regarding the reburial.

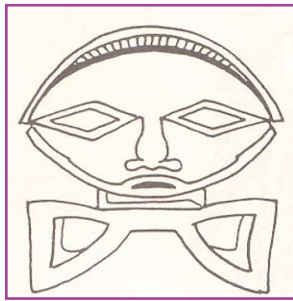
As a volunteer, Ms. Terry has assisted with a variety of events. She has shared her design skills by giving art instruction to youngsters to create African-inspired T-shirts during the OPEI 2003 Annual Youth

Symposium, which was a great success for the 50+ students and young adults in attendance. Her volunteerism does not stop there, however, as Ms. Terry was one of the 40+ African Burial Ground Project Volunteers who assisted greatly with the recent reinterment ceremonies. In fact Ms. Terry along with Volunteers Peter Cole and Jerome Stephens attended all the reinterment ceremonies that commenced in Washington, D.C. and encompassed several other cities as the ancestral remains were returned to New York City for final reburial.

Although she noticed instances that presented some confusion during the reinterment activities, her expression changed to delight when recalling how she felt when the ceremonies finally ended. "It was like a huge feeling of relief," she sighed. Ms. Terry expressed a feeling of joy when referring to Director Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson and her staff at the OPEI. She applauded Dr. Wilson's leadership and extended words of encouragement to continue to educate the public and the world about this exquisite part of history that has too long been absent from the mainstream of society. She further impressed that we must continue to reveal the true history of our ancestors which will only be an asset to all who allow themselves to not only be educated, but updated about this very important segment of U.S. history.



OPEI 2004 SATURDAY CALENDAR OF EVENTS



January 10, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Volunteer Training
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

January 31, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Youth Volunteer Training
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

February 7, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Volunteer Book Club Meeting
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

February 21, 2004 – 12:00 noon
African Burial Ground Film Festival
290 Broadway, 30th floor

March 20, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Volunteer Training
201 Varick Street, Room 1021



April 24, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Annual Youth Symposium
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

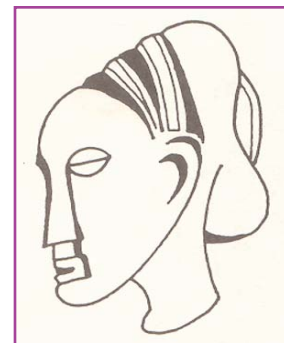
May 22, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Film Festival
290 Broadway, 30th floor

June 26, 2004 - 12:00 noon
OPEI Open to the Public
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

July 24, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Volunteer Training
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

August 28, 2004 – 12:00 noon
African Burial Ground Film Festival
290 Broadway, 30th floor

September 18, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Fall Symposium
290 Broadway, 30th floor



October 16, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Volunteer Training
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

November 20, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Fifth Annual Giving Thanks Tribute
290 Broadway, 30th floor

December 18, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Pre Kwanzaa Celebration
290 Broadway, 30th floor

Monday, December 27, 2004 – 12:00 noon
Kwanzaa Celebration
290 Broadway, 30th floor

All events are free and will be held in government buildings.

Reservations are required.

Space is limited, so please reserve early.

Call 212-337-2001 for information and reservations.



AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND UPDATE



Compiled by

Theresa Austin, Claude Massiah M.B.A, & Andrea Lawrence, M.S.

■ **Youth Volunteer Group for the New York African Burial Ground Project.** The Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) for the New York African Burial Ground Project has over 250 adult volunteers. The time has come to actively engage our youth. The Youth Volunteer Group will consist of adolescents ranging from 12 to 18 years of age. These volunteers, with assistance from OPEI staff, will create and implement activities geared toward educating their peers about our African heritage. The first gathering will be at 201 Varick St. Room 1021 on Saturday, January 31, 2004, from 12-3 pm. There will be a film showing, site tour, and discussion. The day will close with the opportunity to create a New York African Burial Ground T-shirt; be sure to bring your own T-shirt, and the OPEI will supply the rest.

To receive more information about the Youth Volunteer Group for the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) for the New York African Burial Ground Project please contact **Theresa Austin** or **Dorian Harrington** at (212) 337-2001.

■ **Giving Thanks Tribute.** The Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) held its 4th Annual Giving Thanks Tribute on Saturday, November 22, 2003, at 290 Broadway. This Tribute recognized individuals involved with the African Burial Ground Project since its rediscovery.

The program commenced at noon with a Libation and Prayer Vigil with Baba Karade and Chief Alagba. There was drumming performed by OPEI volunteer Gilberto Alvarez and Joyce Jones of Brooklyn, N.Y. shortly after the vigil and before the parties went to the 30th floor for the ceremony. Certificates of Appreciation were extended to all that have been an active part of the project since its rediscovery. The event concluded with a reception.

We thank all who participated and extend kudos to all volunteers who assisted throughout the years. The African Burial Ground belongs to all of us.



■ **OPEI Volunteer Book Club.** The OPEI will be forming a volunteer book club in February of 2004. It is hoped that volunteers will contact the OPEI and signal their intention to participate in the club.

The African Burial Ground book club will be hosted by Public Educator, Claude Massiah, who hopes to encourage and stimulate a interest in reading materials selected by club members. Interested parties can contact **Mr. Massiah** at (212) 337-2001.

■ **The OPEI has a reading room with archives that include information on many documents. Reading Room hours are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m by apointment only.**

Update Newsletter Online and Future Mailings

Update will be published three times a year rather than quarterly. The OPEI's *Update* newsletter is now available online at the African Burial Ground web site, www.africanburialground.com. Starting with the Spring/Summer 2004 issue the OPEI will only be mailing hardcopies of *Update* to those without internet access. If you need to continue receiving *Update* by mail, please complete and return the coupon below to our office address.

OPEI African Burial Ground Project
201 Varick Street, Room 1021
New York, NY 10014

Yes, please keep me on the OPEI's
Update Newsletter mailing list for future issues

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Email: _____

FALL/WINTER 2003 READING LIST

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and
Nonet Dapul

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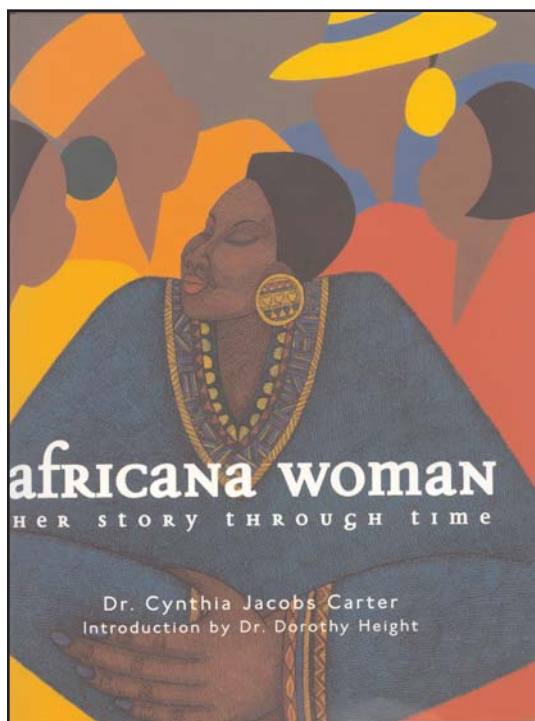
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